

*LSE Director Professor Craig Calhoun finds that the world looks different from India's vantage point, and explains why that matters for the School.*

Every time I go to India I am reminded that the world is bigger and more complicated than I remembered. It's not just that India is vast and diverse and I am so immediately conscious that visiting a handful of cities is not seeing the country as a whole. Nor is it just that India has such a rich history and range of entwined cultures and my own study of these so inadequate. It is that the world looks different from India.



The world looks different from every vantage point, of course, but India is particularly challenging and informative. As travellers often remark, this is partly because of the contrasts it embodies: skyscrapers and slums, the world's largest democracy and endemic corruption, software engineers literally reshaping our technological future and water buffalo pulling farmers' ploughs much as their ancestors have done for centuries. India forces one to recognise that these things co-exist and are connected, and to resist simplistic views in which growth is either equivalent to progress or merely exploitation and inequality by another name. And this reminds us to look at the complexities, at the good and bad, the changing and the enduring that co-exist in our own countries and in globalisation itself.

Globalisation is not simply a matter of instant, ubiquitous communication, or of financial flows, or indeed of universal norms. It is also a transformation of particular places and peoples by their interconnections. It is the participation of differently situated people in partially common processes, based not only on new technologies but also on unequally distributed resources. And it is a phenomenon that looks different from different vantage points.

Trying to understand globalisation better is a basic challenge for LSE. Our founding mission emphasised advancing social science in order to tackle the major issues that demanded attention in order to make the world a better place. Many of today's biggest issues are global: climate change and environmental crisis, urbanisation and migration, financial markets and regulation. These issues are addressed by governments and international organisations, by social movements and NGOs, by global corporations and business consultancies—and LSE students will assume leadership roles in every one of these.

Our founding mission also emphasised the role of knowledge – of understanding the causes of things – in improving the world. LSE became a leader in social science because research-based knowledge was needed to make better policies, to improve professional practice in fields from law to accounting, and to inform public discussion.

Not least of all, our founding mission emphasised sharing this necessary knowledge. Our London location

gave us unparalleled opportunity to host public lectures and debates. More importantly, LSE opened its doors to a wider range of students than older universities. The School pursued equitable admissions policies rather than allowing traditional privileges to determine which students could enrol, and from early on LSE began to offer places not just to a wider range of British students but to students from all over the world. For LSE, teaching is part of its public mission, not a matter of perpetuating private privilege.

My trip to India follows from all this. An invitation to travel with the British prime minister recognises both LSE's long ties to India and our intention to expand those now. The first philanthropic donation the School received after its founding came from India's Tata family in 1912 and today we [collaborate](#) with the Tata Institute for Social Science on the India Observatory. LSE is proud to have educated generations of Indian students who have gone on to national and international leadership, including B.R. Ambedkar, a father of India's Constitution. Some 350 Indian students come to LSE each year, and we are now pleased to be able to offer scholarships to 50 students at the postgraduate level.

Working with a range of distinguished Indian advisers, we are exploring ways in which to make it possible not only for more Indian students to come to LSE but also for other LSE students to study or pursue internships, research and practical projects in India. We want to add to the number of distinguished faculty members doing research in India and create an institutional basis for integrating this work better into teaching. We are also exploring potential new projects with Indian partners—not just to do more of what we already do, but to innovate and learn from shared experiments. These could be in online education, collaborative research or bringing research-based knowledge to public policy and debate.

Indian national higher education policy sets three goals: equity, expansion and excellence. These fit with LSE's public mission to play a role in each. And they fit with our intention to better understand contemporary globalisation and see it from an Indian perspective as well as from that of other key countries around the world. Crucially, working in India and generating new knowledge on major social issues are an important part of our effort to make the world better.

*Return to India At LSE for more updates about Professor Calhoun's trip to India.*

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